

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1104

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY &
NATURAL RESOURCES
SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS &
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

November 12, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Matthews Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: ACA Open Enrollment in Hawaii

Dear Secretary Burwell,

I write today to express some concerns I have about the progress of this year's open enrollment process in Hawaii and to request your assistance in addressing these concerns. I appreciate the work that you and your staff have done in working with Hawaii to ensure as smooth of a transition as possible from the Hawaii Health Connector onto the Federally Facilitated Marketplace (FFM) at healthcare.gov. However, there are three significant challenges during this year's open enrollment process that Hawaii constituents are facing that I would like to bring to your attention.

First, given Hawaii's unique cultural mix and the number of languages spoken in the state, the need for translators during open enrollment is great. Unfortunately, individuals in need of a translator experience greater wait times than others. While I understand there will be some delay as a translator is found, the long wait times Hawaii residents are experiencing is worrisome. For example, media reports indicate that some non-English speakers in Hawaii are experiencing an application process that can take up to four hours.

Second, Hawaii constituents are facing issues with automated identity verification on healthcare.gov, which is also exacerbating wait times. One particular area of concern is the impact of identity verification issues for a group known as Compact of Free Association (COFA) migrants. Due to their unique nonimmigrant status, it would appear that the healthcare.gov system is improperly denying their applications. As a result, COFA migrants are experiencing coverage denials and difficulties in being recognized as eligible for FFM coverage.

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Finally, there are issues with regard to the hours that various necessary healthcare.gov resources are available. While the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) operates a twenty-four hour call center, the special marketplace assister line does not operate during all of Hawaii's business hours. Additionally, the current maintenance schedule which shuts down healthcare.gov at 7 p.m. Eastern time on Saturday limits the ability of individuals to enroll in Hawaii- that is 2 p.m. in the state on a day when many seek help through enrollment assistance centers in the state. I ask that some accommodation be made to account for the time difference between HHS's call center and healthcare.gov maintenance hours and Hawaii.

Enrolling the nearly 40,000 individuals migrating from the Hawaii Health Connector to the FFM is large undertaking. I want to ensure that Hawaii citizens who still need health care are able to enroll quickly and efficiently.

Please do not hesitate to let me or my staff know if there is anything that we can do to assist you in addressing these issues. I look forward to hearing from you about how HHS can help to address the language access, enrollment eligibility, call center and website issues Hawaii constituents are facing.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator